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The Religious

Movement of the Eumenides

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THE RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT OF THE EUMENIDES

BY

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I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY

A. H. Staccings

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on
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THE RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT OF THE EUMENIDES

Aeschylus, one of the greatest dramatists the world has produced, was born of a noble Eleusinian family in the year 525 B.C. Since Greek drama owed its origin and history to religion, we naturally expect to find its spirit preeminently religious. But in the case of Aeschylus there is an additional reason why his dramas should be steeped in religion. The circumstances of his boyhood and early manhood gave his mind a strong religious bias. He lived for a time not far from the temple of Demeter, the patron Goddess of the Eleusinian mysteries. The elaborate services in connection with the worship of Demeter must have impressed him profoundly. He had witnessed and even aided personally in the defeat of the Persians, and thus had Greece been saved from the barbarians in the greatest crises of her history.

Hitherto the religion of Greece had consisted in the belief in and worship of a number of mythical gods and goddesses, about whom a great mass of stories had arisen regarding their origin, powers, relations to each other and to mankind. These beings were little superior to the people themselves. They were immortal men, and not really gods at all. Their powers were greater, but they were subject to the same desires and passions, inspired by the same motives and ambitions, and had corporeal existence much the same as human beings. In this system of religion were many contradictions which up to this time had been accepted without question. But an undercurrent of dissatisfaction and unrest was beginning to manifest itself after the Persian Wars. There were very distinct changes under way toward a freer belief. Aeschylus was too conservative to join

this movement; in fact, he opposed it with all the power of his deep religious nature. But while Aeschylus' dramas nowhere indicate that he was in sympathy with this trend, he did make an earnest attempt to cloanse the old beliefs. He did not discard the revered mythological tales about the gods, but sought to put them on a higher plane, and as far as possible give them a spiritual significance. "The very depth of his religious feelings made him dissatisfied with deities whose nature he could fathom — whose character he could despise. The elastic nature of the ancient system saved him from being an unbeliever." (1). Previously the spiritual significance of the Greek religion had not been very marked, though doubtless it was somewhat influential for character building.

In his efforts to spiritualize the Greek religion, it was inevitable that Aeschylus should at least attempt a solution of some of the religious problems which confronted him. His tragedy, *The Eumenides*, was written primarily for such a purpose. At least that was one of the important reasons for its production.

The Eumenides is the last play of the Orestean trilogy, which deals with the ancestral curse which had come upon the house of Atreus. We can hardly appreciate how deeply this family curse idea was rooted in the Greek mind. It was as real to them as their own existence. The furies, who were the personification of this curse,

(1) B.F. Westcott. "Aeschylus as a Religious Teacher"

could be appeased only by the destruction of the entire line. In them the Greeks found their idea of justice. It was nothing less than blind vengeance, untempered by mercy, reason or equity.

In the *Agamemnon* and the *Choephoroi*, the two other plays of the trilogy, human interest predominates; but in the *Eumenides* the stage is lifted from earth to heaven and we witness a contest among the gods themselves. The *Erinnyes*, representing the older titanic or chthonian dynasty of gods, are arrayed against Apollo, of the newer Olympian dynasty, whose head is Zeus. "The contrast between the older and the younger races of gods as expressed by Aeschylus, rests mainly on a distinction between "an absolute natural necessity", and "free and voluntary agency". As heaven and earth, sun and moon, which belong to the old race, manifest their agency in eternal and immutable duration, so the *Erinnyes* are to be regarded as a natural law of a moral world; without regard to circumstances they naturally fasten upon him who has outraged the sacred rights of consanguinity; and never suffer this outrage to vanish from their memory, but visit it on successive generations. (*Eum.* v. 894).

The Olympian gods, on the contrary, in their whole agency refer so much to specific circumstances that they are incapable of representing these universal laws. Their interference with human affairs is direct and personal. But in the compromise which the *Erinnyes* make of their resentment, the newly established cultus is a pledge of the further exercise of their inherent rights upon earth. This contrast Aeschylus everywhere maintains in a very marked manner; nevertheless he shows a conviction that the conflict between the ancient gods and the ruling powers is merely transient, and prepara-

tory to a higher development of things. With him the world of Olympian gods is in perfect unison with the original powers and, like Pindar, he strives to do away with the legends that imply their antagonism." (1).

Orestes, who had murdered his mother Clytemnestra at the command and threat of Apollo, seeks, at his temple, protection from the Erinnyes, who as curses are pursuing him because he had shed his mother's blood. Inasmuch as Orestes was not responsible for his deed and therefore had a clear conscience, he did not add a link to the chain of crime. The problem then arises as to how he is to be freed from the wrath of the furies. This is the problem which Aeschylus tries to solve.

" The fate of Orestes is the least important part of the Eumenides. In this, as in other dramas of Aeschylus, the interest centers in a great problem having a religious and a moral issue. The climax of the Eumenides therefore, is not the release of Orestes, but the solution of the religious problem involved. With the early Greeks as with other primitive peoples, the nearest relative of a murdered man was bound to avenge his death. This duty involved the further shedding of blood: that is to say, the fulfillment of a moral obligation results in the violation of a moral law. These conflicting duties (the moral side of the problem) the Areopagus settles. The religious problem is to reconcile the commands of Apollo, the god of vengeance and the representative of the younger dynasty, with the claims of the Erinnyes who represent the older gods, and punish those

(1) Drake, "The Eumenides" - Intro. p.62.

who spill human blood. So far as these conflicting claims are not harmonised by the institution of the Areopagus, they are harmonised by the promised worship to the erinnyes." (1).

Manifestly, between the beginning and the end of this play there is a great chasm which the author must bridge. That it may be done artistically there must be a gradual development of the religious movement. We begin with the furies as horrible material creatures, goddesses of vengeance and retribution, we close with them as lofty spiritual beings, singing the praises of Athena and promising manifold blessings to her land. Orestes meets us as a helpless fugitive, hounded to death by the furies; we leave him a free man to enjoy life in his native land. Disorder, strife and conflict greet us; we close with order, harmony and reconciliation between the two orders of gods. The business of this paper is to show how all this is accomplished in a logical manner. I shall try to show this development, first, by the manner in which Aeschylus treats the furies; secondly, by the way in which Apollo gains his point, with the help of Pallas Athena, who, of course, belongs to the Olympian dynasty.

Aeschylus first brings before us the material horror of the Erinnyes, and herein he presents the popular Greek conception. The author seems almost to exhaust his vocabulary in an effort to describe properly these beings. They are wingless, dark, swarthy, and in every way abominable. (2). Their breath is poisonous, (3), and a

(1) F. B. Jevons, " History of Greek Literature " pp 195-196.

(2) L. 51.

(3) L. 53.

loathsome humor falls from their eyes. (1). Neither God nor mortal condescends to associate with them, (2), as their race is hated of all. (3). Their very existence is due to evils and the darkness of the under world, where they reside. (4). They are called harpies, gorgons, (5), almost anything, in fact, to make them as hideous as possible.

The scene in which the ghost of Clytemnestra awakes them, (6), fairly makes us shudder. They groan and snort like some wild beast. (7). These hideous females are possessed of stomachs of fire, by means of which they accomplish the destruction of the material things of the world. (8). Like hounds they track their prey, which are those who shed kindred blood. (9). Orestes is followed by the scent of his blood, though the blood itself is invisible. (10). Worst of all, they will feast on his blood, which shall be sucked from his living members. (11). And whatever line 368 may mean, they crush their victim in some unspeakable manner by the exercise of brute strength, coming down upon him unexpectedly.

For the purpose of the drama, Aeschylus must heighten this conception of the furies. Before the close of the play they are to be persuaded by reason and promises not to visit their wrath upon the land any longer, and such beings could be moved only by material, and not at all by rational means. Their utter destruction would be the only alternative, and this would spoil the play. In outlining the

(1) L. 54 (2) L. 70 (3) L. 73 (4) L. 72 (5) L. 48
(6) L. 117 seq. (7) L. 123 (8) L. 138 (9) L. 210
(10) L. 244 (11) L. 264

spiritual horror of the Erinnyes, he need not go beyond the general idea which the Greeks held in regard to these wrathful curses. Doubtless the Greeks saw that their idea was colored by his genius, skill and imagination, yet fundamentally the author introduces nothing with which his audience is not thoroughly familiar.

(1)

Practically all the first long chorus is a presentation of the spiritual horror which the furies inspire. By singing a baleful song, their victim is in some mysterious way charmed and rendered spell-bound. (2).

Both the living and the dead are in constant terror of these creatures. (3). Their " frenzy-working chant of madness " is a spell upon the soul, " a strain unaccompanied by the lyre, that causes the strength of men to wither up and pass away." (4). " 'Tis theirs to overthrow the homes where murder has been committed, " (5), and especially where a youth has executed the crime, for they hunt after him " and wear down the newness of his young blood." (6). They relieve the gods of the duty of being the avengers of blood. (7). They bring upon their victim a *"σύντονον μάταν"* (8) whatever that may mean. "A fault hard to bear," fails to express adequately the idea of the Greek. By means of their magic dances "the fame of men though noble and high in the eyes of the world is utterly destroyed, and their glories waste away." (9). If I may be allowed to use the expression, they lead men to commit the unpardonable sin. Their prey become so immersed in evils and wickedness that they are entirely blinded to the

(1) L. 299 seq. (2) L. 307 (3) L. 322 (4) L. 329 (5) L. 354
(6) L. 358 (7) L. 360 (8) L. 372 (9) L. 373.

inevitable end of their course. The hearts and minds of the victims of these strange beings become so calloused by madness and guilt that they are entirely insensible to any appeals of right. (1).

In later portions of the play we get additional ideas along this same line. The Erinyes announce themselves as the personified Curses. (2). They pour forth their wrath upon him who treats with contempt the altar of justice. (3). They mock the proud, boastful, haughty man and exult in his inevitable destruction. (4). While perhaps they themselves are not directly responsible for his troubles, they certainly make no effort whatever to prevent his ruin. A similar fate is in store for the bold, lawless transgressor who leads a life of utter confusion and wickedness. (5).

This latter conception is far in advance of the first, as much as is the spiritual (meaning the non-material or supernatural) in advance of the purely material. There is now much more possibility of reconciling the furies. Prayer and persuasion may be of some avail in getting them to change their attitude. As Aeschylus wishes to win the favor of the furies, he must represent them as beings who will at last give way to reason, pleadings and promises, which would have been impossible if an advance had not been made beyond the gross conception which appears at the opening of the play.

As paradoxical as it seems to us, religion and morality have not always been inseparably connected. We have seen that the gods of the Greeks, judged according to modern standards, were in many in-

(1) L. 377 seq. (2) L. 417 (3) L. 542 (4) L. 560 (5) L. 552 seq.

stances very immoral creatures. To Aeschylus immorality was wrong, whether in man or god. This was one point where he seems to have tried to purify the Greek religion.

To give the Erinnyes a moral status will be another great advance toward the goal for which the poet is striving. In this he rises higher than in his former conception. The moral ideas which are woven into the drama are quite distinctly his own, and therefore new to the Greek mind. There were many who were feeling the need of just this thing which Aeschylus sets out to do, and he received a more or less ready response to his teachings at the hands of those who could lay aside the older and accept a newer interpretation of belief.

We first meet such an idea in the play where the furies say of themselves, "ἐνθεσίκατοι δ' οἰόμεθ' εἶναι" - "we boast that we are righteous judging beings." (1). This means much more than that they were the agents of retributive justice. Later in the drama the same idea receives further development. No wrath falls from them upon the sinless man, but they expose those who try to conceal their guilt, and thus escape punishment. (2). They thus become witnesses and advocates for the dead. It is their lot to punish him by whom blood is shed without cause. (3). They inspire moral awe and reverence in the hearts of men. (4). The fear of their wrath deters men from reckless murders and evil deeds of every kind. (5). Thus they become the

(1) L. 312 (2) L. 314 (3) L. 334 (4) L. 389 (5) L. 449

protectors of the afflicted. The appeal to the seats of the Erinyes is coupled with the cry to justice. (1). The fear which they give to men is a wholesome influence acting as a watchman over their souls. They teach men wisdom by bringing sorrow into their lives. (2). They are the goddesses of moderation, of true health of soul, which alone is pleasing to them. (3). They are directly opposed to lawlessness, license, despotism, pride, violence, graft, dishonor and ingratitude to parents, and irreverance to guests, (4), the latter two principles being very fundamental in the Greek social fabric.

Aeschylus goes even farther. Greek religion was full of retribution and punishment for certain wrongs, but it offered very little reward for righteousness. There is at least a suggestion of this idea when he affirms, "παντὶ μέσση τὸ κράτος θεὸς ὥ πασεν",—"to the true mean in all god gives success." (5). The tone is more certain when the poet says, "ἐκ δ' ὕγιᾶς ἡ βένων ὅ πᾶσι φίλος καὶ πολύενκτος ἄβος",—"from the soul's true health comes the fair fortune, loved of all mankind, and aim of many a prayer." (6). The following sentiment is unmistakable. He who is gladly and voluntarily just, without being constrained or compelled, shall not be unblessed, neither can he ever be utterly ruined or overthrown. (7).

With this preparation we are not surprised to hear the Eumenides singing their glad song of promises of blessings and plenty at the close of the play. But it would have been a difficult matter

(1) L. 511 (2) L. 517 (3) L. 526 (4) L. 549 (5) L. 529
(6) L. 535 (7) L. 550 seq.



to accomplish this transition if they had not been given a high moral sense beforehand. Herein is revealed both the religious movement of the play and the great genius and skill of the dramatist.

Several passages scattered through the play have a psychological bearing upon the conflict between Apollo and the furies, and are sign boards on our way, showing us whither our path is leading. After tracking Orestes by the scent of his blood, the furies find him clasp-
ing the statue of the goddess Athena, hoping to have the matter come to trial under her protection. (1). Orestes had the promise of Apollo that this would take place, a fact of which the furies were wholly ignorant. (2). They go on declaring that it may not be so. The fact is that the furies know this is the necessary way to his safety, and they must prevent it if possible. They are fully aware that any trial, with the Olympian dynasty as one party to the suit, can spell only defeat for the other. A similar idea is hinted at where the furies say their office is to take the guilty into their hands and prevent the matter being tried by the gods. (3). This is exactly what they feared was going to be done with Orestes. Just after the previous passage the furies assert that Zeus has cast them out from his fellowship. (4). It is not improbable that this fact was a source of some joy to them just then, as it also precluded any possibility of a trial. At least the furies hoped this would be the result.

This then is the first indication of the issue of the conflict, from the point of view of the furies. And a mighty conflict it was, too. The Erinnyes, the sole survivors of the old titanic

dynasty are in a life-and-death struggle. Arrayed against them is Apollo, and consequently the entire Olympian dynasty. The freeing of Orestes would deprive the Erinnyes of their prerogatives as Goddesses; but worse than that, the entire system of ancient gods would be ridden down and overpowered by their younger opponents. This was what the Erinnyes feared the most. The particular matter at hand was of small consequence, in comparison with this all important question. In a later passage the furies are perfectly willing that a trial should be given over to Athena presiding over the court of jurors. (1). Here there are two possibilities; either they do not fear the outcome, or they see that it is hopeless to remonstrate, and give their consent as the only alternative. The latter seems more logical and in keeping with the former attitude of the furies. This view allows us to carry through the idea that, point by point, the furies are yielding to the inevitable.

The seventy-five-line chorus (2) in the middle of the play is much more lofty and majestic in tone and sentiment than any previous utterance of the Erinnyes. They are now beginning to see the handwriting on the wall. This chorus is really a great lament, depicting the chaotic conditions which will result if the younger gods win in the trial. It is not any wonder that the furies should mourn their defeat, since they alone preserved domestic order, which is the very foundation of all government and civilization. The very shrine of justice itself would lie prostrate in the dust. (3). Ever after parents would live in dread of being murdered at the hands of their

(1) L. 433 (2) L. 490 seq. (3) L. 516.

children. (1). Such a condition would promote civil strife, for which absolutely no cure could be found. (2). With so much at stake, and the fight a losing one, the furies break forth in some of the grandest passages of the entire play. This seems to be the turning point of the drama. And the entire chorus is an additional and more certain indication that the Erinnyes expect nothing less than defeat at the hands of their younger opponents.

The furies voice a very strenuous objection to Apollo's interfering in the trial. (3). This again points out the strong antagonism between the two dynasties of gods. Only Zeus himself held a more important position than Apollo in the Olympian dynasty. The furies know that with his aid Orestes is sure to be freed. It is the ever-recurring struggle of the conservative against the progressive, the old against the new. As is almost always the case, the former must yield to its younger adversary. The furies are about to go down the third time, as it were, and are making their last awful struggle for life. They again give utterance to the same sentiment asserting that "Apollo has come uncalled to take a murderer's part." (4). But in vain do they object; it is only a silent acknowledgement of impending defeat.

After Apollo has bested the furies in argument, they make a rather hollow threat that they will vex the land. (5). At the best it is only a last resort. A little later Apollo charges them with being dishonored among both the younger and the older gods. (6).

(1) L. 496 (2) L. 503 (3) L. 575 (4) L. 715 (5) L. 711
(6) L. 721

While this shows the disadvantages under which the furies are laboring it is really no indictment against them, as they are only carrying out their functions. From the very nature of things, the situation could not possibly be otherwise. Apollo may seem to be taking an undue advantage of his adversaries, yet it is only additional evidence that the Erinnyes are making their last stand. In two passages the furies acknowledge that Apollo had defeated their purpose on former occasions. (1). Furthermore they admit that he is riding them down, (2), and with them all the ancient laws of justice, morality, and all the bonds of society itself. The Erinnyes imagine that their defeat will carry with it the moral and civil destruction of the human race. Who has ever striven with a nobler purpose in view than this? In desperation and defeat they appeal to their mother Night to behold how they are being defeated and dishonored. (3).

We will now consider the development as indicated in the course which the author pursues in the case of Apollo and Orestes. It will become increasingly evident that Apollo never entertains the slightest doubt as to the issue of the trial. There is ever a tone of confidence and victory in what he says, or what is affirmed of him. In the very beginning the history of the Delphic oracle is ingeniously used to exalt the authority of the God who is the representative and organ of divine revelation. Popular legend had it that Apollo had occupied his oracular seat by force. This was entirely unsuited to the poet's purpose, so he has Apollo receive the office by right-

(1) L. 723, 727 (2) L. 731 (3) L. 745.

ful succession. The introduction of this new idea by Aeschylus is strictly in accordance with the sanctity and dignity of the oracle, ideas which the plot of the drama requires.

After promising Orestes that he will not forsake him, but will ever be his guard, whether near or far away, (1), and taking the responsibility for the murder of Clytemnestra, (2), Apollo claims the aid of Zeus by saying that he (Zeus) will have pity upon an outlaw, when a divine power guides him. (3). Zeus was the god of strangers and suppliants, and they naturally turned to him in time of need. When we remember that to Aeschylus Zeus was almost spiritual; and also that the head of the Olympian dynasty is therefore on the side of Orestes, defeat for him is impossible. "Throughout the Oresteia, he (Aeschylus) exhibits dimly and in the background, and therefore with more poetical effect, a third power "Zeus Sotêr", pervading the universe and conducting the course of events to the best possible issue. The name $\Sigma\omega\tau\acute{\eta}\rho$ is therefore similar to $\tau\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\epsilon\iota\omicron\varsigma$. In the ceremony of his worship, the Olympian gods are first opposed to the chthonians, and then "Zeus Sotêr" is conceived as a third power and lord equally over both worlds." (4). Therefore Aeschylus indicates clearly the trend of the drama when he brings Zeus into the controversy. In fact Apollo goes so far as to assure Orestes that when he goes to Athens and claims the protection of Athena, some means will be found of freeing him from his trouble, and arresting the curse. (5).

(1) L. 64 (2) L. 84 (3) L. 92 (4) Drake, "The Eumenides" -
Intro. p. 63 (5) L. 81.

It is interesting to note how Apollo continually thwarts the furies in their pursuit of Orestes. First, Orestes seeks his shrine as suppliant. (1). Then the Erinnyes go to sleep while watching him and thus give the fugitive an opportunity to escape. (2). This is the more remarkable when it is remembered that the furies were supposed never to rest or sleep. Apollo takes advantage of this fact and sends Orestes to Athens, (3), where he arrives (4) just ahead of his pursuers. (5). Again they are frustrated. Perhaps this is just a hint as to what is to be the final issue of the whole matter.

Apollo again shows his authority when he drives the Erinnyes from his temple. (6). His description of them is revolting to read. But as repulsive as the description is to a modern reader, it must be remembered that Aeschylus is using his words to produce a definite dramatic effect upon those who heard the piece played. The furies must be made repulsive in order that men may despise them and lend their feelings to Orestes. Later in the play these unpleasant sensations are to be relieved by the consent of the furies to the new order. The author skillfully uses all these minor points to indicate the general drift of the drama.

In the conversation between Apollo and the furies beginning with line 198, the attitude of Apollo is one of confidence, superiority, and almost disdain for his adversaries. He belittles their office (7) and unhesitatingly declares that he bade Orestes avenge his father, (8), with the implication that it was none of the furies' bus-

(1) L. 40 (2) L. 47 (3) L. 74 (4) L. 235 (5) L. 253
(6) L. 179 (7) L. 209 (8) L. 203.

iness.

Athena, of course, is supposed to maintain an attitude of strict impartiality in all that she says and does, and makes an honest effort to play well her part. But this is difficult because of her relationship to the Olympian dynasty. It is impossible to eradicate the personal equation; and in her conversation with the chorus (1) her prejudice soon manifests itself. She questions somewhat the justice of the furies in thus driving Orestes to his death. (2). It was natural for the furies to desire to keep Apollo out of the case entirely. Athena suspects this when she asks, "ἀλλὰ ἰσὺς ἀνάγκης, ἥτις τοις Τρώων Κότοισι" (3). The other constraint, of course, refers to Apollo. In other words, Orestes is not personally guilty for the murder of his mother. She moreover questions a little the sincerity of the furies in being so willing to conform to the letter of the law in the procedure of the trial. (4). These things all afford a good criterion of Athena's attitude and from this we can be reasonably sure that if the decision comes to her, the furies will lose.

It is necessary for us to keep constantly in mind the fact that Aeschylus' audience would never tolerate anything that would in any way question the position and authority of the Olympian system. To do so must have been considered a very serious crime against the state, as this was one of the charges upon which Socrates was condemned many years later than this play. Hence in portraying this trial on the stage upon a religious occasion, it was imperative that

the side of Apollo and Orestes be victorious. It was also quite as necessary that the entire plot and action should point to this end. The trial therefore is only a formality at the best. It was not so difficult to carry out the plot from the point of view of Apollo. It was natural to exalt his office. The great problem was to work out the development in the case of the furies, a point which has been treated in the former portion of this paper.

Orestes puts the blame for the crime upon Apollo, asserting that he (Apollo) even had threatened him, seeing that the laws of vengeance of the younger gods would be destroyed unless Clytemnestra should be slain at the hands of her son. (1). This move by Orestes would undoubtedly serve to enlist the sympathy of Athena.

The tone of the assertions of Orestes is anything but that of fear and uncertainty, such as seems to characterize the sayings of the furies. In his conversation with the Chorus (2) he is open, plain and ready with the facts about the murder, not trying to shield himself nor conceal any of the truth, such as would be expected of one who was guilty of a great crime, and feared the issue of the trial. Notice particularly this statement, "*καὶ σεῖρ' γ' αἶ Τὴν Τύχην οὐ μέμφομαι*". (3). To paraphrase, "if he is not proud of the deed at least he is not sorry that he did it." It may be noted also that Orestes gives the little details about how he held the sword and where he inflicted the wound, (4), things which would ordinarily tend to incriminate him and prejudice the court. Such an attitude on the part of the accused points quite clearly to the fact that he entertains no fear whatever about the issue of the trial.

In the speech of Apollo, beginning with line 614, the mention of great Zeus is another point scored in Orestes' favor. The young god gives the jury to understand that what he will say will be inspired of Zeus, and that no oath can be greater than the might of Zeus. In other words, "their oath to give a verdict according to the evidence must yield to the higher obligation of following the divine will rather than the letter of the law." (1). Arrayed against such powers it is not any wonder that the hope of the titanic goddesses is very empty and distant. Apollo's continued references to Zeus would serve to make it more and more impossible for the jury to decide the case against the younger dynasty of gods. Such references must also have been very discomfiting to the furies.

Note in the next speech of Apollo, (2), in describing the murder of Agamemnon, how he refers to him as "γενναῖον." Few things could appeal more strongly to an Athenian audience than a detailed description of the death of such a noble born, national hero as was Agamemnon to the Greeks. Apollo says himself that he is giving the story to thrill the hearts of the judges. (3). No Greek jury, in the face of such evidence and appeals, would be likely to condemn Orestes.

Let us now notice the telling and effective manner in which Apollo overthrows the arguments of the furies. First, to justify Orestes in overthrowing a mother's rights in avenging a father, he recites the detailed account of the murder of Agamemnon, (4), with a

(1) Plumptre, "Aeschylus, Tragedies and Fragments," Vol. 2, p. 166, note 2.

(2) L. 625 seq. (3) L. 638 (4) L. 625 seq.

view to showing how deliberate and treacherous Clytemnestra had been in her bloody crime. In answer to the Erinnyes' charge that Zeus was inconsistent, as he himself bound his father Cronos, (1), Apollo asserts very logically that chains may be loosed and such an action righted, but that the dead can never be resurrected. (2). Hence there is no similarity whatever between the two actions. Then to clinch things, Apollo in his last speech very shrewdly appeals to one of the popular theories of the day. His argument is that the mother is not the real parent of the child, but the father who begets, is the true parent. (3). This was also in perfect accord with the social position generally held by an Athenian wife, who was always considered to be inferior to her husband in every way. To prove the point it was natural to cite the case of Athena standing before them, who, according to tradition, had sprung full-grown from the head of Zeus. (4). No more convincing argument could have been put into the mouth of Apollo, and proving the point by referring to Athena would create no little enthusiasm, and give double assurance that Apollo will accomplish his purpose. There was no refutation of this point. The Erinnyes are a little nearer their doom.

Apollo affirms that he had sent Orestes, an Argive, as suppliant to Athens in order that Athena might gain him and his race as everlasting allies. (5). This of course could be accomplished only

(1) L. 625 seq. (2) L. 644 (3) L. 657 (4) L. 664 (5) L. 670

on the condition that Orestes be freed. Inasmuch as a treaty had been signed the previous year (459 B.C.) making Argos an ally of Athens, no reference could indicate more clearly what is to be the issue of the trial.

There seems to be much difference of opinion as to the exact meaning of the rather vague passage in which Athena apparently casts her vote for Orestes before the jurors themselves have acted upon the case. (1) . Whether or not she really did cast her vote at this moment, at any rate she announced her position before the twelve judges had voted, thus possibly influencing the opinions of some of them.

In spite of the fact that practically the entire movement of the play has indicated strongly that Orestes would be freed, the author has the votes of the judges equally divided for conviction and acquittal.(2). We should have expected a preponderance of opinion on the side of Orestes. But there are important reasons why the vote should have been thus. First, in the procedure of the Aeropagus an equal division always acquitted, as an additional vote was cast for the accused and was known as that of Athena. Again, in reconciling the furies to their loss, Athena could argue that they had not really been defeated since the ballots were equally divided. But greater than either of these reasons, the purpose of the play required it. It was necessary to have human justice divided equally on the case, so that Athena might step in and cast s divine vote for mercy. This really is the climax of the drama. Its religious significance reaches its highest point at this moment.

(1) L. 734 seq.

(2) L. 753

In the remainder of the drama Apollo and Orestes take no part whatever. The predominating purpose of the author has been accomplished by the freeing of Orestes. Whether or not Aeschylus thereby solves the ethical problem is not up for discussion here. It remains, however, for the Erinyes to be reconciled in order to ward off the evils which it is still in their power to visit upon the land. From the fact that they are in a measure moral beings, or at least look with favor upon those men who live righteous lives, it follows that they will probably submit to persuasion and reasoning a second time as they have done in the case so far. Moreover when their wrath has been duly appeased and they shall receive the worship and reverence of men, they will become kindly, beneficent powers, instead of goddesses of blind wrath and vengeance. When this has been accomplished, we shall be prepared for the splendid and possibly surprising close of the play, in which the furies join with Athena in prayer for all blessings upon the land. Let us now consider the further movement of the drama and note how Athena reconciles the furies to their defeat and subsequent loss of former position and power.

In accordance with the heightened character which Aeschylus has given the chthonian goddesses, we find that the tone of their choruses is now much more stately and dignified. While they contain threats and the elements of wrath and vengeance, yet their predominating note is one of lamentation and sorrow. We can not help but feel that their anger against Apollo and Athena is a dying threat which they will never be able to fulfill. On the other hand we find a prominent strain of regret and remorse that they have been defeated, dishonored and thrust out of their rightful position as goddesses. This is especially true of the last two choruses, which are identical.

The following passage illustrates the point exactly, "ἀπὸ γάρ με τιμᾶν
σαυαῖαν θεῶν δυσπάλαιοι παρ' οὐδὲν ἦραν δόλοι," (1), which is, "For
lo! deceits that none can wrestle with have thrust me out from honors
old of gods, and made a thing of naught." (2). There is nothing in
the choruses proper which indicate that the furies will submit to the
pleadings of Athena. But remembering their grievance, we can better
understand why they finally do submit.

In passing it may be said that if the Erinnyes were absolute-
ly determined upon their future course of vengeance and destruction,
they probably would not stop to let Athena plead and argue the case
with them. This may be considered as a slight indication of what
will be the result of the pleadings of the Athenian goddess.

A consideration of the speeches of Athena shows that they
contain comparatively little real argument, such as Apollo advanced.

In the beginning however she partially proves to the furies
that they had not been defeated as the votes were equal; (3); there-
fore they had not been put to shame. (Small consolation for the furies,
indeed.) At this point also another reference to the evidence of
Zeus indicates how strong is Athena's side of the case.

Athena was very politic and immediately began to make promis-
es to the erinnyes, promises, too, which exactly meet the great la-
mentation of the furies, viz: that they had been dishonored. It is

(1) L. 877 seq. (2) Plumptre, "Aeschylus, Tragedies and Fragments,"
Vol. 2, p. 177, L. 838 seq.

(3) L. 795

possible, but not very probable, that they will long refuse the offer of being honored and worshipped by people who had hitherto hated them. The things which gods and goddesses desire, above all else, is worship and reverence. Athena could not have made them a more tempting and winning offer.

Athena soon increases her offer to the furies. (1). In addition to worship, they shall receive as marriage and birth offerings the first fruits of the land, by reason of which they will always be thankful that Athena persuaded them to cease from their wrath and accept her offer.

Further advancement is noticeable when Athena asks her adversaries to use their imagination, and think of the time when the Athenians will grow in wealth, glory and honor. (2). If they now go to another country, they will yearn in love for this people, whose worship they have rejected. Other gods will then receive gifts from the Athenians — greater than those made by any other mortals — which the Erinnyes might be receiving. Moreover Attica of all countries is most beloved of all the Gods. Athena is attacking the furies at their weakest point, and we shall expect them soon to consider her proposition, at least.

In her last strong appeal (3) Athena makes it practically impossible for the goddesses of wrath to maintain longer their position. Her argument is this: if the erinnyes are reasonable,

(1) L. 834 seq. (2) L. 852 seq. (3) L. 885 seq.

and willing to be persuaded, they will accept their proffered home in Athens. But if they persist in refusing the offer, then they can not justly bring woes upon the land, especially since Athena is giving them a position of much more honor and authority than they had previously held. Since the Erinnyes are reasonable, moral beings, they do the expected and relent. Finally, after a brief conversation, they accept completely the proposition made by Athena, (1), and join with her in prayer for unlimited blessings upon her land.

In this reconciliation of the Erinnyes which closes the movement of the play, Aeschylus accomplishes completely the purpose for which he was working. As Mr. Paley has expressed it, "The plot may be said to represent the infancy of a new theology, a period of transition in Greek thought from the mere fear of devils to the faith in and worship of celestial beings, willing and able to save guilty man." (2). Orestes exercises such a faith in Apollo, as the infallible interpreter of the supreme will, and it is this faith which gives him so much assurance and makes him meet the opposition of the furies with steady confidence. We surely find here a near approach to the modern Christian conception of a living and saving faith in a divine personality. Aeschylus helps to eliminate the dread fear of wrathful powers from the Greek religion by transforming completely the nature of the Erinnyes. The former furies, the personified Curses, agents of blind vengeance, hated of all gods and men, henceforth are to be loved and worshipped as the Eumenides, "the gentle sisters" goddesses of blessing, beneficent and kind, loved and honored of gods

(1) L. 916 (2) Paley, "The Eumenides," Intro. p. 6

and men. Herein is contained the great advance in religious thought by Aeschylus, not seen in either Sophocles or Euripides. By giving these spiritual conceptions to the Greek religion, the author makes it a much greater influence and force for character and righteousness in the hearts of his countrymen.

The drama closes with a grand procession, which must have called forth a mighty enthusiasm from the Greeks. It consisted of Athena, at its head, then the Eumenides, then a band of Athenian women young and old. As it wound its way round the Areopagus to the ravine in which the propitiated goddesses were to find their sanctuary, the women sang a chorus of joy and triumph, inviting the Eumenides to their new home.

Reconciliation of the divine and the human, for the advantage of both, is nowhere shown in Greek tragedy with any such convincing power as this play, and its final act, set forth. Dramatically, the triumphal procession made up of elements so diverse but an hour before, and now united in a common song of rejoicing, is worthy of Aeschylus' best invention. Perhaps no more powerful scene is to be found in any tragedy, of any age, wherein the ancient Curses mollified and accepted of men, join them in celebrating this new and fruitful harmony between heaven and earth. This is a very notable contrast to the situation which confronted us at the beginning of the play. In closing, I will quote what Mr. Westcott says in regard to the reconciliation of the furies. "Their divine power is acknowledged and placed above the questionings of men. In part they are established as the representatives of conscience, in part as the fulfillers of material law. It is by the voice of divine wisdom

only that a limit is placed to their vengeance and their working. For the rest, they are recognized as having an inevitable power over the prosperity of men; they are honored in all the crises of life; they are received as companions of Pallas herself. The Immortals (Olympian Gods) admit their influence. Terrible and loathsome though they are, children of the night and dwellers in subterranean gloom, they yet obtain the reverence and offerings, and even the love of men. In human worship, the awful Goddesses of inexorable retribution are seated beside the Zeus-born Goddess of wisdom." (1) . And herein is the finale of the religious movement of the Eumenides.

(1) Westcott, "Aeschylus As a Religious Teacher," Contemporary Review, Vol. 3, p. 363





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